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Pioneering Feminism: How Early American Female Authors' Heroines Defy Gender Norms

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Abstract

As I began to make decisions about what I wanted to write on, I started to consider the novels that have impacted me. After realizing that many of my favorite novels featured female protagonists from the early twentieth century, I came to the conclusion that I could use these novels to discuss feminism, a topic I am passionate about. I selected *O, Pioneers!* by Willa Cather, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, and the short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Each of these authors use their protagonists to represent women who do not conform to the gender norms placed on them, and who often suffer as a result. Alexandra Bergson, Willa Cather's heroine in *O Pioneers!*, inherits her father's farm when he dies and brings the land back to life single-handedly, rather than her brothers. The protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is trapped in a room by her husband and doctor in order to help her "condition." As a result, she becomes insane over time. Wharton's Lily Bart is a twenty-something socialite struggling with the idea of marriage and freedom in high-class society. Edna Pontellier, of *The Awakening*, becomes more and more aware of the hold that the patriarchy has on her. She becomes dissatisfied with her life and marriage and seeks out ways to reclaim her individuality.

While this is not the first paper of its kind, it is apparent that similar works do not always acknowledge characters as a whole – leaving out their failings and their differences. An emphasis on the diversity even among these four stories is vital. They are not simply "women," they are individuals, although fictional, who navigate the patriarchy differently; they reflect women's different experiences under the thumb of masculine "superiority." The research began with an examination of the articles in relation to both the four stories and the literature of the time period in general as it relates to women. This thesis also analyzes feminist criticism as well

as cultural contexts. I found that what enables these characters to subvert the patriarchy is maintaining their identities, particularly in regards to sexuality, spirituality, and work. With this information and an analysis of the characters' roles within the novel, this work intends to uncover the significance of certain components of individuality in women under the patriarchy and what this means for women of their time and of today. Edna is the archetypal feminist character, and by comparing her behavior with those of the other three heroines, we can find what makes a feminist in early American literature. What is truly significant, overall, is how each character takes on a different kind of feminism that adheres to each of their personalities, each defying the patriarchy in their own way.

Methods

My research began with searching for journals pertaining to the four texts themselves, but also to cultural contexts and feminist criticism. Articles were retrieved through the Knight-Capron Library Database with guidance from the librarians who assisted in collaborative research. Articles also came from other databases such as JSTOR, Muse, and Gale. These databases were selected for their reputation as quality, peer reviewed research. Research primarily focused on textual evidence, but contextual research was also performed in order to solidify understanding and argumentation. The majority of the authors I chose to consult are specialists in feminist literary studies.

Literature Review

Defining Feminism

Feminism takes on a number of different meanings depending on the time period and the individual. It should be noted that the term did not exist at the time most these stories were written. For the purposes of this thesis, the term "feminism" refers to a recognition of the

inequalities between men and women and a defiance of male privilege. This typically includes a nonadherence to assigned gender roles in some capacity, whether that be women desiring autonomy, an escape from the "housewife" lifestyle, etc.

The Protagonists as Feminist Heriones

Naturally, the authors of these novels, Wharton, Cather, Gilman, and Chopin, are generally regarded as feminist authors. They bring about a greater understanding of the plights of women through their unique writing styles and female protagonists. However, not all of the stories' protagonists are widely considered feminist icons. Alexandra Bergson, of Cather's *O, Pioneers!*, is probably the strongest contender for the label, and the research about her reflects this. Marilee Lindemann writes, "To say that Cather 'queers the 'classics'' is to say first that she ... responded directly and resistantly to the all-male pantheon of duplicitous swashbucklers" (85). This notion is reflected in Alexandra's character, and it immediately sets her apart as a feminist herione. However, it is important to note that Alexandra is able to live this way because she has fewer patriarchal restrictions placed on her. Edna, who is certainly one of the most prominent feminist protagonists in history, sets an example for what people typically regard as feminism. In his discussion of *The Awakening*, William Davis argues that Edna undermines the patriarchy by choosing self-sacrifice for the greater good rather than for the whims of those who have a perceived power over her (565). And while Alexandra and Edna are wonderful examples of feminist characters, it is also important to note that not all feminism is this overt. Lily Bart and the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," though they suffer further at the hand of the patriarchy, can also be regarded as feminist heroines. This thesis is intended to accomplish this goal, therby representing the diversity within the label of "feminist." While many consider feminism to entail very specific qualities and beliefs, these four heroines demonstrate that the term can take on a

number of different meanings. Women do not necessarily have the means to be as radical as Alexandra or Edna, but they find other ways to assert their individuality, furthering the cause for women as a result.

Context: Hysteria and Delicacy

An important background for this study is the awareness of the fact that the female body and mind was highly misunderstood in the early twentieth century. Laura Briggs notes that notions of hysteria were created by men to apply to their wives in order to maintain control over them (Briggs). In her study of *The Awakening*, Cynthia Griffin Wolff notes that women of this time period were not even so much believed to possess any sexual feelings (3-4). Cather, Wharton, Gilman, and Chopin demonstrate that these assessments of women are unfair and cruel, reducing them to less-than-human beings. Susan Cruea writes that during the time in which these novels were written,

> women were the continual victims of social and economic discrimination. Upper-and middle-class women's choices were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood. Both choices resulted in domestic dependency. While they could find jobs as shop girls or factory workers, women were discouraged from being wage earners by the belief that women who earned wages were 'unnatural'(187).

Indeed, women were expected to be little more than assistants to their husbands. Furthermore, expectations for women's appearances resulted in extravagant clothing, such as corsets, which led to physical ailments (Cruea 189). What scholars have done since these four stories were written is to try and understand how these restrictive assumptions would have played into the novels. They examine the impact of patriarchal domination on these women, observing their

methods of resistance and identity reclamation. This study attempts to extend scholars' evidence and apply this knowledge to the texts at hand. While many other scholars have written about hysteria and feminine gender roles in literature, this thesis aims to examine the validity of the heroine's various means of asserting their separation from those roles, even though they may be different from those of other characters and from "typical" feminism as a whole.

Sexuality and Libido

Edna is widely regarded as being one of the most sexually aware heroines in early American literature, and this is reflected in the passionate terminology Chopin uses to describe her affairs. She wants to escape the patriarchy by being with a man who makes *her* happy, rather than being subservient to him. However, her momentary encounters with this freedom end in her partners' enforcement of patriarchal ideas. She rejects them as a result. Amanda Rooks notes that "in her pursuit of sexual fulfillment, she consciously aligns herself with 'life ... that monster made up of beauty and brutality,' and, as a result, feels 'neither shame nor remorse'" (130). Through her sexual explorations, Edna knows herself more intimately, reclaiming her body from the patriarchy. While "The Yellow Wallpaper" does not discuss it directly, many scholars believe that, in addition to suffering from postpartum depression, the protagonist of the story is also sexually frustrated. Writers such as Jonathan Crewe and Carolina Nunez-Puente note that, because her husband did not understand her, the narrator probably had little to no sex life. They even cite evidence that suggests a queer nature within the protagonist. This applies to the other characters of this study as well. While Alexandra is almost unanimously thought of as a queer icon, Lily may not appear to be. However, Lori Harrison-Kahan argues that Lily shares a queer connection with Gerty Farrish.

It should also be noted that the terms “queer” and “homosexual,” in the context of this thesis, can generally be regarded as interchangeable. This is because, according to June Cummins, in the 1890s, people began to use “queer” to refer to homosexual individuals (21-22). Thus, usage of “queer” in this thesis can be assumed to imply homosexuality. I am also using the terms to refer to a degree of same-sex desire as opposed to a literal homosexual relationship.

Work and Creativity

This study identifies one of the great patriarchy-defying traits that these heroines share is an interest in some form of work or creativity. Women of this era were expected to remain at home to care for the children while men were to be the breadwinners. Women working outside of these assigned gender-boundaries were considered a threat to masculinity. Eliabeth LeBlanc notes the vitality of artistry to Edna, citing that Mademoiselle Reisz “nourishes… Edna's ‘rich inner life’ through her music… [and] gives ‘practical and political support’ in her advice concerning Edna's artistic ambitions...” (299). Both of these characters recognize the importance of creativity in every woman’s life. For Alexandra, there are a plethora of studies on her work, but not necessarily specific what the work itself means for her feminism. Authors like Alan Brown note that, for the protagonist of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” writing is her creative outlet; this of course, *is* in direct defiance of the patriarchy, as her husband tells her not to write (Brown 66; Gilman 4). There is little scholarship surrounding the discussion of Lily Bart’s work which, considering the textual evidence, is an essential aspect of her character development. Her eventual sense of charity helps her to become a more fulfilled, nonconforming woman, and this study attempts to capture these aspects.

Faith and Spirituality

While there are articles relating to the spiritual aspects of these four characters, they do not all tie together in a way that demonstrates the essence of gender norm defiance within each of them. James Gargano argues that faith is the most essential aspect of Lily Bart's life (and death) (137-143). There are many articles relating to Alexandra's spiritual connection to the land, such as in Susan Hill's article, "Landscapes of Excess: Sexuality and Spirituality in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *The Song of the Lark*." Her article helps readers to gain a broader understanding of how Alexandra's unconventional spirituality makes her different. This thesis also takes into account Wolff's argument of how the religious patriarchy of *The Awakening* had devastating effects on Edna's spirituality and applies this argument to Lily Bart. Lily's desire for morality and annoyance with conventional religious traditions reflect the dominating male presence in the clergy, and she, like Alexandra, seeks out a faith all her own. Alan Brown notes that Gilman's protagonist likely has spiritual tendencies, citing her references to ghosts and the unseen (62). This thesis takes these ideas a step further, noting how her husband's outright denial of these elements is a violation of her character and autonomy, as she specifically identifies herself as a spiritual being. Because these women decide what faith means to them on individual levels, they subvert the patriarchy and reclaim their autonomy. However, masculine domination of the church in their times creates an environment that causes women to be susceptible to being manipulated. Cynthia Griffin Wolff writes, "Not surprisingly, then, beginning in the 1870s and continuing through the end of the century, the Presbyterian church in America suffered a crisis over the role of women that might well be defined by the question, 'Shall Women Speak?'" (4). The church served as the "bastion" for women to be coerced into subservience (4). Men can easily manipulate the true teachings of Biblical text in order to force women to yield to their

wishes. The patriarchy has made continuous efforts to strip freedom from women in all areas of life.

Edna as the Example

Scholars everywhere agree that Edna is, without a doubt, a feminist icon in literature. Elizabeth LeBlanc states, "*The Awakening* has been claimed as a signal text of feminist criticism and women's studies, a symbol of a woman's struggle to reappropriate her own mind, body, and soul from the confines of male domination" (289). Dedi Rahman Nur writes, "She does not want to be the typical female of that time and give up her entire world, herself and soul, for her children" (7). This is a daring, anti-patriarchal notion, as "[the] traditional perception that women only have a role as mother" dominated societal standards at that time (1). Indeed, it is impossible to deny Edna the title of feminist, as she makes herself autonomous from her husband, indulging in affairs because *she* wants to and even moving out of her home in order to maintain her identity. As a result, many of Edna's actions are what one might consider "typical" feminist behaviors. By using Edna as the archetypal feminist character, this thesis will examine how Alexandra, Lily, and the unnamed protagonist engage in similar feminist endeavors, but also how they invent their own means of asserting their feminist identities.

Introduction

Feminism is one of the great topics of the modern day, garnering campaigns such as the Women's March and the #MeToo movement. Feminist discourse has led to incredible advancements for women, from the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919, to the first major party female presidential candidate in 2016. However, political warfare has made many

doubt the mere existence of male privilege, making the discussion increasingly relevant. The nation is still very far from true gender equality. For example, women are still in want of equal pay, and tampons still carry a luxury tax. The Managing Director of the World Economic Forum estimates that the United States will not achieve gender equality for another 208 years (Zahidi). As politicians and citizens set out to reduce this number, it is important for everyone to reflect on the feminists of the past. In the attempt to solve this issue, it is vital to maintain awareness of what methods worked for those who have come before. The voices that women bring into literature both increase awareness of the plights of women and demonstrate the necessity of female influence. By examining the literature of early American female authors, readers become more aware of how these women were able to further the cause in a world dominated by men. Women can take these lessons and apply them to the current political and social environment. As the patriarchy attempts to erase female identity, the protagonists of *The Awakening, The House of Mirth, O, Pioneers!,* and "The Yellow Wallpaper," each written by a prominent female author, reclaim their identities through sexuality, spirituality, work, and character.

Sexuality: New and Renewed Relationships

Sexual freedom is vital to a woman's identity. Without the ability to act on her true sexual nature, their bodies become essentially controlled by the patriarchy, existing for men rather than for a woman's own pleasure. While the four protagonists of "Pioneering Feminism" meet with such dilemmas, they seek to reclaim their sexuality for their own. Edna Pontellier, of course, is the prime example of this reclamation, openly engaging in affairs with other men and declaring that her body is her own. She, as well as Lily Bart, becomes frustrated with their fruitless efforts in attaining a sexually fulfilling marriage, so they seek it out in other men. Edna, much like the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper", suffers from an unfulfilling marriage. Her

husband, Leonce, is often absent from the home. Because of this, Edna spends more time with her friend, Robert, and eventually falls in love. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff puts it, Edna comes to a "place where man and woman awaken each other to share the 'beauty and brutality' of life together in mutual affirmation[,] [each] owning sexual appetite; both sharing the stern burdens of brute passion" (16). Now that Edna "owns" her own sexuality, she can find freedom from the patriarchal standards of male-pleasing sex and marriage. Her newfound freedom and passion that she feels with Robert is apparent in the descriptions of their time together. Amanda Rooks writes,

> The revelers' journey to the water is... replete with sexual allusions. The group is buoyed by wine and accompanied by laughter, the strains of distant music, and the musky odors of 'damp, new-plowed earth' and 'white blossoms'. They enter the water, which swelled in 'foamy crests [that] ... coiled back like slow, white serpents,' 'as though into a native element'. For Edna, this suggestion of a… state of possession is ultimately accompanied by the… state of awareness, achieved via a sense of self-overcoming, of standing outside of herself… (135-136).

Being with Robert fuels the flame of Edna's sexual awakening. As she discovers what she finds fulfilling, she gradually frees herself from her husband's patriarchal dictates. However, she eventually realizes that she no longer wants to be with Robert, as he reverts to his patriarchal role. As Edna rejects his discussion of marriage, she also rejects further submission to men (Wolff 17). Because the general perspective surrounding sex is about male pleasure, women's often goes unnoticed. It is in another man, however, where Edna finds a primal lust within herself. This man is Arobin. Chopin writes, "They became intimate and friendly by imperceptible degrees and then by leaps. He sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at

first and brought the crimson into her face; in a way that pleased her at last, appealing to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her" (91). Of this quote, William Nelles argues, "...her sexual activity may be seen as the otherwise absent precipitating motive for Edna's moving out of her husband's house" (44). The bold decision to move allows Edna the freedom to explore her sexuality without being held back by her husband.

However, there is also a "moral" weight attached to female sexuality. Cynthia Griffin Wolff notes that women during this time were, according the masculine morality, only allowed to retain a piece of their libido in order to create children, and that "on these terms, ... sexual activity—even moderate sexual 'desire'—was appropriate in 'normal' women"; this is a notion Edna has disproven, as she engages in more than one liaison, indicating a high sex-drive (7). With this historical context in mind, the following line from "The Yellow Wallpaper" takes on a new meaning: "How those children did tear about here! This bedstead is fairly gnawed!" (17) Not only does this reflect the strain the protagonist's children are to her life but also more specifically to her sexual life. They appear to be tearing at her very bed, stripping away her libido for themselves to claim. Just after, the protagonist says, "I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes. I want to astonish him… This bed will not move! I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner - but it hurt my teeth" (18). This endeavor to impress (or frighten) John is the protagonist's method of reclaiming a sexual life with her husband. When she tries to move the bed, she is also trying to reawaken their sensuality but to no avail. Regardless of her persistent attempts, the protagonist cannot be free from the patriarchy's claim on her body while she is under her husband's lock and key. During the time period in which these characters would have lived, women were not even believed to have any sexual feelings at all. Wolff writes that "the

official ‘scientific’ and ‘medical’ view can be stated quite simply: an average woman (a ‘decent’ woman) possesses no sexual feelings whatsoever” (6). With this great misunderstanding about the female body, it is unsurprising that women like the unnamed protagonist and Edna would desire an escape from such lies. Edna, like the unnamed narrator, desires her body for herself, not for her children. Even if these women wanted to talk about their sexual desires, they would be unable to, as the language for such communication did not so much as exist at the time (Wolff 3). This is reflected in the meaningless, contradictory babble of the parrot in *The Awakening*, who, like Edna and other women, is unable to communicate its needs without the tools of language (Wolff 3). For these characters to attain true sexual freedom, they need to have the language and the right partner in order to have productive communication about their desires. However, male domination is only concerned with its own pleasure, and these two women, like many others, feel unfulfilled as a result.

Lily goes about her sexual discovery in an unproductive manner. She attaches the entire idea of freedom to Lawrence Selden. In fact, out of the novel’s 15 uses of the term “freedom,” almost all of them are employed in relation to him. For example, the text reads, “Selden reflected that it was the same streak of sylvan freedom in her nature that lent such savour to her artificiality” (14). Early on in the reading, Wharton informs readers that Selden, a man with good social standing, simultaneously has an air of “social detachment” about him (55). Because Lily sees this quality in herself, she wants to live vicariously through him, as he, as a man, has the ability to choose how he navigates society whereas she must cater to the whims of her peers. She cannot present herself as “detached” because she has to make herself entertaining in order to maintain her good standing. As a result, she becomes infatuated with this unattainable social

freedom, and in turn, Lawrence Selden. She is, however, aware that this is the case. Lily is aware that he is "[not]... notably brilliant or exceptional," but she likes him because he

> [has] points of contact outside the great gilt cage in which they [are] all huddled for the mob to gape at... In reality, as she knew, the door never clanged: it stood always open; but most of the captives were like flies in a bottle, and having once flown in, could never regain their freedom. It was Selden's distinction that he had never forgotten the way out (55).

She is unable to find her emancipation from the patriarchy by fostering romantic and sexual attachments to a man who, even unintentionally, enforces its concepts.

Sexuality: Queer Desire

Several of the authors in this thesis boldly explore ascpects of queer desire as it relates to feminism, which was largely unaccepted at the time. Alexandra Bergson serves as a prime example of such notions regarding sexual exploration. It is no surprise to the literary community that Cather was, in all likliood, a lesbian. Marilee Lindemann's biography *Willa Cather: Queering America*, states, "In examining Cather's lengthy apprenticeship and creative emergence, O'Brien traces a progressive consolidation of her identities as lesbian, woman, and writer, a story that ends happily with the publication of *O Pioneers!* in 1913" (5). Alexandra, therefore, is the reflection of her author's coming to grips with her sexual identity. Indeed, it is widely regarded that Alexandra is a reflection of Cather, and "[although] Alexandra has typically been seen as a representative of the pioneers who settled the prairie, she can be better understood as a representative of Cather, herself a pioneer staking out a new territory in art" (Peck 5). A Nebraskan prairie girl herself, Cather uses this novel to imagine herself in a life in which her days as a pioneer are more successful (Peck 13). But because Cather was unable to express

homoesexual relationships freely in literature due to the time period, she places queer desire in the land. Sharon O'Brien writes,

> Cather's inability to write directly from lesbian experience may have also contributed to the most powerful presence in her fiction: the land. If Cather had been free to write openly of erotic and romantic love between women, we might have been deprived of her sexually and emotionally charged descriptions of the landscapes that stirred her-the Divide… (598).

Clearly, Alexandra's land serves as an outlet for her queer desire, where, as she develops the land, she develops her own sexual inclinations. She does not allow the patriarchy to dictate her character, but rather, she clings to it, displaying it proudly.

Some scholars have argued that Alexandra does not possess same-sex desire because she becomes engaged to a man. Indeed, why should she enter into a marriage with someone she is not attracted to? As the text indicates, it is because this is a relationship of friendship and convenience, not passion. Her engagement to Carl is not one fraught with lust and desire. She tells Carl directly, "I think we shall be very happy. I haven't any fears. I think when friends marry, they are safe. We don't suffer like—those young ones" (308). Because Alexandra chooses not to indulge in her homosexual desire, she decides that she will be happy in a marriage to her friend, even if it means she will not be in love. Regardless, scholars might argue that this action means that Alexandra is succumbing to the patriarchy. However, this is not the case. Carl simply serves as a companion and even that feminine idea of "helper." Alexandra's firm grasp on her sexual identity sets her apart as a woman of power, able to maintain this identity in spite of male oppression.

Alexandra had the advantage of self-sufficient singleness, but for the protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper," this is not the case. Carolina Núñez-Puente argues that "the heroine embodies a queer self, one that has severe problems living with her contradictions and adjusting to the gender parameters of her time;" these gender roles swap at the end of the story in which John faints from her creeping (16). This is Gilman's indicator that the established gender constructs are meaningless, and as a result, sexual ones are likely as well. Queerness does not necessitate literal lesbianism, but it is indicative of same-sex desire. Some might question whether or not a queer theorist's reading of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is warrented, but Jonathan Crewe argues that the repeated use of the term "queer" alone warrants it (276). Furthermore, he cites the scene in which Jennie comes to care for the narrator as evidence of a non-heterosexuality present within the two women. He acknowledges that "[however] 'innocent' this situation may appear - and however unknowing the narrator may in fact be - it would be historically false to suppose that, in 1890, there could be no lesbian implications in sentences like 'Jennie wanted to sleep with me' or 'she wouldn't mind doing it herself'" (280). Indeed, because the protagonist is feeling neglected by her husband, she would likely want to seek affection elsewhere. Jennie is providing her with the necessary physical and emotional attention that she lacks from men. Likewise, a scene in *The House of Mirth*, with equally sensual language, demonstrates Lily's natural inclination towards women. Her disinterest in men other than her friend, Lawrence Selden further suggests lesbian inclinations. If she only loves Selden because he represents the idea of freedom, then she does not truly love him. She simply longs for freedom. She finds it briefly in Gerty Farrish. Lori Harrison-Kahan asserts that there is a homoerotic element between the two. While this is not an immediately obvious idea,

Harrison-Kahan makes a compelling case, citing the scene between Lily and Gerty in the bedroom, writing,

> When Lily appears on Gerty's doorstep, her desperate clinging to her friend appears to be innocent of sexual connotations... As the scene progresses, however, Gerty's mixed emotions for Lily culminate in the sensual moment that takes place between the two women in the bedroom… Although it just misses the mark of the overtly sexual, this scene—in which the women share a bed, Gerty undresses Lily and puts her lips to warmth, and the two women engage in the tabooed caressing—is certainly the most erotic in the novel (44).

The physicality in this scene is rather blatant, much like the language in the scene between Jennie and the unnamed protagonist. So what does this indicate? It certainly could be argued that these characters are simply interested in women. Perhaps this could partly explain why Lily is consistently unhappy with her male suitors, and why the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" has a dissatisfying marriage. Harrison-Kahan, however, asserts that Lily and Gerty's repression (both with each other and with their mutual object, Selden) is representative of the women's feelings of oppression from the patriarchy; their desire for male privilege is displaced onto one another (44, 37). This same displacement also applies to the protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper." As it has been established that Lily is attracted to Selden for the very reason of his privilege, it would make sense that she would do the same thing to a woman who also finds herself, in her "dinginess," free from certain social constraints that Lily is ensnared by. In this way, she and the unnamed narrator escape the patriarchal, heternormative life, even if only briefly.

Symbolism also plays a role in a queer interpretation of the texts, particularly in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Crewe asserts that the wallpaper is representative of the narrator's sexuality,

and he reflects on the scene in which she and Jennie tear it off. He says, “The attatchment of queer affect to the wallpaper presents itself as an attempted violent detachment from it on the part of the narrator” (248). As a result, the narrator loses her fleeting encounter with her queerness. One could easily argue that this is loss of sexual freedom; the power of the patriarchy is too much for one individual to totally overpower. However, in their isolation, the unnamed protagonist, as well as Lily Bart, reclaim for themselves a slice of their sexual freedom. Though temporary, they are able to explore another facet of their identity in spite of the patriarchy.

Sexuality: Within the Heroine

While some characters discover sexual fulfillment in other people, others have it within themselves. Alexandra finds sexual gratification in other aspects of her life. Susan Hill writes that “Alexandra's landscape fantasies—yellow wheat, rustling corn—” indicate that the land which she tends to is where she finds her sexual satisfaction, “superseding Alexandra's human marriage with her connection to a sexual… landscape that can fulfill her deepest needs” (115). In this way Alexandra actually denies the patriarchy by silently declaring that she does not need men to become sexually realized. By the end of the novel, Alexandra becomes fully understanding of her sexuality. Her recurring dream about the mysterious, masculine figure carrying her across the Divide has baffled scholars for decades. Scholars have offered multiple interpretations about its significance, but what is truly noteworthy is the revelation she has at the very end of the novel when she tells Carl, “I had a dream before I went to Lincoln—But I will tell you about that afterward, after we are married. It will never come true, now, in the way I thought it might” (308). As she comes to realize what this dream means to her, she comes to terms with her personal sexual awareness. Sexuality is implied because of her physical responses

to the dream. Cather writes that Alexandra "had never been in love,..." but that after having this dream,

> she would rise hastily, angry with herself, and go down to the bath-house that was partitioned off the kitchen shed. There she would stand in a tin tub and prosecute her bath with vigor, finishing it by pouring buckets of cold well-water over her gleaming white body which no man on the Divide could have carried very far (205-206).

Her earlier confusion about the dream is her method of figuring out her sexuality. She dreams of a man she knows does not exist, but when she realizes that this dream will not "come true" how she believed it would, she comes to understand that her sexual connection to the land, not Carl, will be what fulfills her. Susan Wiesenthal confirms the land's erotic nature, writing, "At once robust and delicate, fusing conventional attributes of male and female within herself, the heroine's… nature also facilitates a vital, erotically fulfilling relationship with the land — virtually the only salutary relationship offered by Cather in *O Pioneers!*" (52). This positive attachment to the land is a stark contrast to the relationship between her heterosexual brother, Emil, and Marie Shabata. This is Cather's way of indicating that Alexandra is elevated, able to seek her sexual fulfillment without the aid of men. The text's language also solidifies this claim. One line reads, "There were certain days in her life, outwardly uneventful, which Alexandra remembered as peculiarly happy; days when she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body the joyous germination in the soil" (203-204). This direct correlation between Alexandra's body and the Divide offers an arousing explanation of the deep, erotic connection between the two. Likewise, the protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper" attempts to seek out sexual revelation on her own, without men. Just as non-hetero sexualities were a very taboo topic of the time, onanism was as well. As a result of John's lack of attention

and his wife's failed attempts to change his mind, she likely seeks out other means of sexual satisfaction. Núñez-Puente also suggests that those mysterious "smootches" so often referred to in the story indicate that the narrator masturbates (17). This is a firm denial of the patriarchal idea that a woman needs a man, or anyone for that matter, to satisfy her sexually. She proves that she is capable of self-sufficiency in many regards. This mode of sexual reclamation is unable to be taken from her by the patriarchy. While these two characters do not go about finding sexual liberation in the blatant way that Edna does, they seek it out in a way that is appropriate and meaningful to them as individuals.

Spirituality: The Denial of Patriarchal Religious Tradition

While sexuality is certainly a key component of one's sense of self, spirituality also often claims a great stake of one's identity. Edna, our archetypal feminist heroine, is the most outspoken about her spiritual identity. As men dictate the words of God to women, Edna (and Lily) seek other methods of finding faith. Edna Pontellier lives in a very religious society, but for her, spirituality is not so liberating. Wolff writes that "Edna's particular religious background could not have been chosen casually by Chopin, for a woman reared in this faith during the 1870s and 1880s (the years of Edna's youth) would have been preternaturally susceptible to the most crippling elements of [patriarchal dictates]" (4). Indeed, a true grasp of faith is difficult when men use it wrongly as a means to dictate a woman's life. Even when she was young, Edna notes that she could be found "running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by [her] father that chills [her] yet to think of" (20). Her whole life, her notions about spirituality were presented to her through the interpretations of men. As a result, "the Presbyterian clergymen of Edna Pointellier's youth demanded that woman (sic) keep to their 'natural sphere' of home, hearth, and motherhood" (Wolff 5). When the men who are looked up

to make such claims, women are affected with devastating guilt for desiring anything else. What could be a healthy spiritual life is squandered by male oppression and selfishness. *The Awakening* confirms these ideas, saying "A feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the [church] service" (42). While tiredness is not so uncommon at church, persecution is not. Similarly, Lily makes some efforts to attend church, but those efforts "contain the germs of rebellion" (57). In fact, in a particular chapter, she misses the service altogether, indicating that she attaches no serious gravity to religious ritual. The oppression of women by this male morality has turned Edna and Lily away from church and organized religion. Chopin, in fact, likens Edna's perceptions of Sunday with the foreshadowing of her death. She writes, "The long line of little gray, weather-beaten houses nestled peacefully among the orange trees. It must always have been God's day on that low, drowsy island, Edna thought. They stopped, leaning over a jagged fence made of sea-drift, to ask for water" (42). In the sea where she will later die, Edna sees the futility of her attempts to appease the patriarchal clergymen. To her, Sunday is equal to suffering. Lily attempts the practices of traditional Christianity, but, like Edna, she finds them unfulfilling. Her ill-fated courtship with Percy Gryce lends itself to the same idea. Gryce has a reputation as a goodly, devout, Christian man. As a result, Lily knows that, if she is to marry him, she, too, will have to take on such a role. However, Lily's smoking and gambling habits are hardly compatible with Gryce's by-the-book religiosity. When Lily and Percy's relationship falls apart, it becomes apparent that Lily will not be a legalistic Christian. Unlike Alexandra, Edna is unable to discover her own personal spirituality, and thus, fails to subvert the patriarchy by means of participating in some sort of faith; however, she *does* find a sense of freedom in her private rejections of such conventions. Lily, on the other hand, will later find her own pathway to faith. By dismissing traditional religious practices, Lily and Edna refuse to allow

the patriarchy to determine how they will conduct their beliefs. They choose to hold themselves to their *own* standards rather than the standards of men.

Spirituality: Creating Her Own Faith

Religion and faith are, more often than not, tailored to the individual. Looking beyond tradition, Alexandra, Lily, and the unnamed protagonist reclaim their spirituality in this way. Alexandra is unconcerned with tradition or about what a man would ask her to believe. While reading *O Pioneers!*, Alexandra's spiritual nature becomes increasingly apparent. She has an almost ethereal presence, with a "thoughtful face, and her clear, deep blue eyes… fixed intently on the distance" (6). She possesses what seems to be a sort of omniscience with her determination. Along with her deep bodily connection to the land comes an equally great spiritual one. Cather writes,

> The ground is frozen so hard that it bruises the foot to walk in the roads or in the ploughed fields. It is like an iron country, and the spirit is oppressed by its rigor and melancholy. One could easily believe that in that dead landscape the germs of life and fruitfulness were extinct forever (187-188).

Here, Cather makes a direct correlation between the country and spirit. Alexandra sees her land as a living thing, so much so that it could be "melancholy." Another passage reads, "Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman" (65). Again, Cather makes another overt connection between "the Divide" and the "free spirit." It is in this Divide that Alexandra finds her spirit and her freedom from male oppression, as this is her great achievement, all by her own hand. Susan Hill further argues that Cather is using this passage to refer to the book of Genesis, and that she

> turns the order of nature in Genesis on its head, placing the woman in a positive connection to the land, as its guardian. In this new Garden of Eden, there will be no Fall because here there is no dominion, no struggle for power, no rebellion; instead, there is attachment, alliance, affection (108-109).

Without the presence of the proverbial "man," the land thrives, clearly implying that a woman is entirely capable when she is free from the hindrances of the patriarchy. Furthermore, Alexandra's recurring dream is highly indicative of a spiritual nature, which in turn, provides her freedom. "She [longs] to be free from her own body," and this dream alleviates her pains (282). Hill asserts that "[it] is Alexandra's recurring dream that shows how profoundly the landscape has saturated her being. On Sunday mornings, when the other denizens of the prairie go to church, Alexandra experiences her own private spiritual... ritual with the landscape" (Hill 109). She escapes the patriarchal expectation for her to attend church in order to foster her own chosen spiritual self. Because of this, Alexandra persists through even the worst situations. Even after her brother's murder, she is able to say, "There is great peace here, Carl, and freedom.... I thought... that I should never feel free again. But I do, here" (307). In the land, she restores her spirituality; it is the sole purpose of her life, just as religion is for many.

Lily Bart, unlike Alexandra, does not appear to be a woman of any great spiritual prowess. But faith does impact her in other ways. Towards the end of the novel, when Lily goes to visit Nettie Struther, Wharton writes,

> [It] had taken two to build the nest; the man's faith as well as the woman's courage. Lily remembered Nettie's words: *I knew he knew about me*. Her husband's faith in her had made her renewal possible—it is so easy for a woman to become what the man she loves believes her to be! Well—Selden had twice been ready to stake his faith on Lily Bart; but

> the third trial had been too severe for his endurance… There remained to her… the uplifting memory of his faith in her (311).

Once again, Lily ties a crucial part of her identity to a man, offering her only temporary relief from her grievances. The patriarchy still holds her firm in its grasp, telling her again and again that only a man's faith in her will fulfill her. It has accomplished the task of stripping away Lily's individualism. So if Lily cannot find her spiritual self in Selden or in tradition, then how can she? James Gargano argues that it is in that one word she wants to exchange with Selden at the end of her life. He writes, "the enigmatic and revelatory word that Lily does not achieve until the end of her life is "faith"" and that "[it] affirms that a force of mysterious origin and sanction is to be found at the center of all life" (137). Lily cannot productively profess faith in traditional religion or in man's approval. Her hope lies elsewhere. Gargano writes that it "is no generalized and temperamental optimism; it is, instead, an almost mystical assurance that only moral action can save the ever-threatened continuity of human existence" (142). It is in this faith that Lily finds self-fulfillment at the end of her life (137). Through the progression of the novel, Lily's interests come to lie more in genuine kindness than in selfish ambition, which gives this argument a solid framework. Although Lily is ultimately condemned to death by the hand of the patriarchy, she uses her faith to reclaim her identity in her final moments: the identity of one who desires to be an aid to those in need and to witness changes in the world for the betterment of women's treatment.

While the spiritual elements in "The Yellow Wallpaper" are not immediately visible, the supernatural components and references to John's ideas about the unseen indicate that there is reason to believe that spirituality plays a rather important part in the protagonist's life. The protagonist identifies herself directly as a spiritual being, referring to her "ghostliness" about the

house (4). In this way, the narrator draws a correlation between herself and the supernatural, wherein her spirituality lies. Conversely, her husband does not share this foundation. As the narrator writes,

> John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures. John is a physician, and perhaps - (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) - perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster (3).

As John is the story's antagonist and the symbol of the patriarchy, it is important to note how this denial of the validity of her supernatural spirituality takes devastating action against a woman who identifies so strongly with it. What John sees as "practical" is the very thing that destroys the narrator, openly invalidating her beliefs and identity. This demonstrates just how foolish and self-serving the rules and ideals of the patriarchy are. While men often claim to be free of the emotional, illogical thinking that they attribute to women, they ironically embody them by ignoring a true knowledge of the workings of the female body and mind. Alan Brown notes another interesting link between the protagonist and spirituality. He writes that, based on her observations of the wallpaper, her behavior is reflective of a condition known as pareidolia, the "tendency to see animals in clouds or faces in a piece of toast or in a rock outcropping on the side of a hill" (62). He further refers to research which concluded that

> [psychologists] believe that pareidolia may be more prevalent in some types of people than in others] and that an experiment found that "religious people and those who believed in the supernatural saw faces [in pictures of lifeless objects and landscapes] more often than the non-religious and the skeptics (63).

This fact alone may not be enough to assume that the narrator possesses a spiritual nature, but when coupled with the other textual evidence, it seems reasonable. Of course, it can be questionable, if not dangerous, to attempt to diagnose a fictional character. However, regardless of pareidolia, the fact that the protagonist does see people in the abstract *does* indicate a sensitivity to the supernatural, as Brown notes. It is clear that she utilizes her spirituality in order to create a world of her own outside the mandates of her controlling husband, but his suppression of her beliefs is detrimental to her health. Regardless, her adherence to her "ghostly" spiritual nature helps her to resist the limitations upon her. She takes ownership of her beliefs, firmly denying the patriarchy of its claim on her spirit.

Work: Artistic and Creative

A person's abilities and work habits sum up a major portion of identity, as these are the things that will take up most of a person's life. Edna is unable to work in her circumstances; however, her artistic nature does her a great deal of good. She faces difficulty finding a constructive, meaningful outlet; however, her mind's inclination towards music, art, and philosophy provide her with a sense of deep satisfaction. Elizabeth LeBlanc notes that "[she] sets up her artist's studio within the Pontellier home, seeking fulfillment and selfhood through her painting" (296). Though she does not play much herself, Edna dotes on Mademoiselle Reisz's musical abilities. This is why she says that Edna is "the only one worth playing for" (32). No one appreciates the art quite like she does. It inspires her to daydream, painting pictures in her imagination such as "a dainty young woman clad in an Empire gown, taking mincing dancing steps as she came down a long avenue between tall hedges. Again, another reminded her of children at play, and still another of nothing on earth but a demure lady stroking a cat" (31). This indicates a strong creative mind, and she even gives pieces new names in order to suit her

reimaginings. Much like how the unnamed narrator sees figures in the wallpaper, Edna turns music into images in her head. Their minds allow them to escape from their patriarchal world to find temporary relief in the beautiful and the complex.

Alan Brown notes that "artistic drive has to find some sort of release" (66). It is made clear that the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" also possesses naturally artistic inclinations when she notes that the wallpaper has "[one] of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin" (5). She has an awareness of what is attractive and stylistically appropriate. Though she is trapped in her room, "The Yellow Wallpaper"'s heroine finds solace and independence in her writing. This is perhaps one of the most obvious means of work as patriarchal subversion, as both John and the protagonist's brother tell her that she is "absolutely forbidden to 'work' until [she] [is] well again." However, she "[disagrees] with their ideas"... saying "that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do [her] good" (4). The term "forbidden" should not be used in anyone's marriage, but men often assume such power especially at this time. Since she cannot work outside the room, she takes up writing even though "[John] hates to have [her] write a word," a particularly harsh term to describe something that brings the narrator joy (5). These attempts to limit the narrator's creativity, while masked as concern for her wellbeing, is simply a means of control and domination. His attempts to suppress her creative drive are detrimental to her wellbeing, but her denial of those instructions is the narrator's way of taking back her individuality that her husband tries to tear away from her. Brown further suggests that the narrator's pareidolia and her artistic nature go hand-in-hand (65). Just as the male figures in her life invalidate her spiritual and sexual identities, they also deny her artistic freedom. However, the narrator will not allow herself to lose these aspects of her personality. She rejects the patriarchal advice and continues to write, owning her ability to judge

what is best for herself. She maintains the other aspects of her personality on paper, which brings "great relief to [her] mind" (3). Once again, the protagonist is making the most of her abusive situation by maintaining her own self and following her own beliefs through her writing, and she carries them through her eventual descent into madness. Edna's spirit, too, from the start to the end is implied to have artistic tendencies. In the first chapters of the story, the text offers clues about the artistic draw to the sea, as Chopin writes, "The sun was low in the west, and the breeze soft and languorous that came up from the south, charged with the seductive odor of the sea" (15). This artistic image of the beach rings of foreshadowing importance to Edna's character development. Just the way that she perceives it offers insight into her imagination. Even unto death, Edna's final thoughts are the words of Mademoiselle Reisz, "The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies" (133) This last act of daring and courage presents itself as art, as, "for the first time in her life she [stands] naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that [invite] her… The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace." (132-133). Though she is dying, Edna feels a sense of satisfaction in the art that surrounds her and the freedom provided by her imagination. She will no longer be subject to the whims of men. Edna and the narrator both cling to their creative identities until the very end.

Work: Serving Others

Alexandra finds her most meaningful work in tending to her land and serving others. The land is the most central aspect of Alexandra's character. On his deathbed, John Bergson, her father, tells Alexandra that "no one [understands] how to farm it properly" (22). But, of course, she is the only one who does, and the neighbors "would have told you that [hers] was one of the richest farms on the Divide, and that the farmer was a woman, Alexandra Bergson" (83).

Because this work can only be done by her, it provides her with a purpose in life and earns her respect from everyone around, male and female alike, setting her apart from her peers. They know that "Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best" (84). Not only is she skilled at farming, but it is an extension of herself, and it brings her joy. It is in this joy that she escapes the confines of the expectations of men, focusing only on what is meaningful to *her*. In fact, she trusts her own instincts above her brothers'; for example, she builds a pig corral directly against their wishes, and the endeavor is highly successful (46). Cather is using Alexandra to demolish patriarchal standards of capability in rational decision making and intellectual superiority. Alexandra's boldness in knowing the value of her own abilities makes her an exceptional heroine and feminist icon. Some authors, however, argue that her successes were not all quite so triumphant as they first appear. Marie-Claude Perrin-Chenour argues that success comes at the price of Alexandra's sexuality, as she enters into a heterosexual engagement at the end of the novel (63). However, it seems more reasonable to assume that she *does* find happiness with Carl. Alexandra proves to be a trustworthy character, so when she says, "I think we shall be very happy," there is no reason to believe that she does not mean it (308). In any case, her work cannot be diminished by her relationships or lack thereof. Alexandra is able to conquer the patriarchy in her own way. She is happy in the end, looking out over her land, her life's work, which gives her meaning. She chooses her roles both as a caregiver and as a farmer, making her both the matriarch and patriarch in an almost godlike way. Though the patriarchy would like to reserve such an identity for itself, Alexandra remains firm in her identity regardless.

Throughout *The House of Mirth*, Lily struggles to find satisfaction in her work. Though she does not find meaning at first, she eventually sees the world through new lenses as a result of

her newfound humility. While the work at the millinery was nothing to her, what Lily comes to discover, rather too late, is that charity work is fulfilling to her. When she first comes into contact with the poor at the Girls' Club, Lily sees that the girls "were clothed in shapes not so unlike her own, with eyes meant to look on gladness, and young lips shaped for love—this discovery [gives] Lily one of those sudden shocks of pity that sometimes decentralize a life" (148). Because Lily has not experienced humility at this point in the novel, she does not continue with the charity work. However, when she encounters Nettie Struther later in life, a girl for whom she had funded her healthcare, she is renewed by the girl's success in life. Nettie Struther, "[the] poor little working-girl who had found strength to gather up the fragments of her life, and build herself a shelter with them, [seems] to Lily to have reached the central truth of existence" (311). Foreshadowed in her first encounter with the members of the Girls' Club, Lily finds herself identifying with these young women, admiring their ability to build themselves up from poverty, even if that means living with some "dinginess." Alexandra shares this sympathy towards those without a proper living situation; she finds meaning in serving others, specifically outcasts such as Ivar. While her brothers make fun of Ivar, Alexandra validates and reassures him. She even invites him to live with her and "to read the Bible aloud to her" which, as previously mentioned, is not Alexandra's predominant source of spirituality (87). However, because it means something to him, she wants to be a part of it and to make him feel welcomed. Both Lily and Alexandra come to the place where they view downtrodden outcasts as something of their own equals. This helps the two to understand what is meaningful to them, reclaiming purpose in their identities.

The home environment, such as the one Lily found profoundly important at the home of Nettie Struther, is also of great importance to Alexandra. Helen Wussow notes, "This separate

community [for outcasts] exists in [Alexandra's] home, where she surrounds herself with refugees from the present who take shelter in her attempts to reconstruct the past," referring to Alexandra's old family furniture (2). Although Alexandra herself feels more at-home outside, she tries to make her home a welcoming place for others. Cather writes,

> The pleasantest rooms in the house are the kitchen—where Alexandra's three young Swedish girls chatter and cook and pickle and preserve all summer long—and the sitting-room, in which Alexandra has brought together the old homely furniture that the Bergsons used in their first log house, the family portraits, and the few things her mother brought from Sweden (84).

This is significant because it demonstrates the importance of family to her - she wants her kitchen to be a place for the girls to spend time together and her sitting-room to reflect her family's past. Alexandra takes on both the maternal and paternal roles for others in order to share her wealth and love. Had she not met her unfortunate end, Lily could also have been greatly fulfilled by this type of charity work, even if it meant she would have to be more hands-on in her service. As Lily says, this seems to be "the central truth of existence" (311). If Lily had humbled herself further and taken on Gerty Farrish's friendship whole-heartedly, she would have been able to rise up, just like Nettie, and to find purpose in her life. However, her charity work, specifically for girls, also indicates that this was her means of subverting male supremacy. As women support other women, they are proving their independence from male care. Of course, this mode of service was approved by the patriarchy. Does this, then, truly qualify as a feminist activity? While the service itself may not be radially unique, it *does* give Alexandra and Lily (especially the latter) a greater sense of their own identities and values. Both Lily and Alexandra find their own identities in helping others reclaim their lives.

Defiant Traits: Independence

Edna Pontellier, frustrated by conventions, assumes "unfeminine" habits upon deciding to deny patriarchal standards. She most blatantly proclaims her independence both in her speech and actions. Although being by oneself was considered inappropriate for women, "[she] [likes] … to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places" (67). It is here that Edna feels liberated from the eye that keeps her bound to arbitrary propriety. It is by this means that she "[becomes] herself and daily [casts] aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (67). Lily, though she is unsatisfied with being alone, remains so in order to maintain her standards. Lily's choice singleness, in and of itself, is considered unfeminine due to her age and gender. While she is conflicted about whether she ought to marry for her own pleasure or for a secure lifestyle, she openly chastises Selden for suggesting she "ought to marry the first man who [comes] along" (11). She asserts "that there are men enough to say pleasant things to [her], and that what [she] [wants] is a friend who won't be afraid to say disagreeable ones when [she] [needs] them" (10). This dauntless proclamation of the kinds of relationships she desires is a far cry from the idea of the woman that Selden presents her with. Even though her fickleness will eventually cost her her life, Lily remains true to this ideal relationship until death. She and Edna both rebel against the patriarchal idea that a subservient marriage is "what [women are] all brought up for" (11). They reclaim ownership of themselves from the patriarchy by retaining independence.

Alexandra's choices mark her as an intelligent, independent woman. When, as previously mentioned, she decides to go ahead and build the pig corral, she is willing to defy her brothers' input in order to pursue her own intuitions. Her ability to trust herself prompts her to shelter Ivar, who is himself an outcast. Though this brings about scorn from her brothers, she knows that she

is making the right decision. This presentation of individuality and competence certainly does not adhere to the time period's expectations for female behavior, but it does set Alexandra apart. The protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is another example of a woman whose intellect makes up a great portion of her identity, but unfortunately, her efforts to broaden her prowess meet with more resistance. While it has been established that, for the protagonist, writing is an important means of escape, it is also a markedly "unfeminine" trait which she adheres to nonetheless. Ghandeharion and Mazari note that "it is the secrecy with which she is keeping that journal that suggests that women are not supposed to carry out intellectual undertakings such as painting and writing, if they desire to be seen as the perfect mother, wife and/or housewife in such patriarchal societies" (114). Indeed, not only does the unnamed protagonist continue her "mascline" activities, but also she further solidifies herself in such traits by keeping information about her doings from her husband. As a result, she denies the idea that "perfect" motherhood should have to come at the expense of identity, much like Edna Pontellier. Elaine Showalter notes that "[the] role of the intellectual is traditionally gendered masculine, and women are excluded from consideration" (Abstract). Clearly, Gilman is attempting to dismantle this idea, as she herself "studied art for a time at the Rhode Island School of Design" (Lane, x). As a writer and artist herself, Gilman recognized the importance of intellectual pursuits to the life of a woman despite its masculine implications. Gilman's protagonist's eventual descent into madness is clearly an affront to what many consider feminine behavior; however, her insistence to "creep" is the very thing that emboldens her to bring her independence to John's attention, and she tells him, "'I've got out at last,' said I, 'in spite of you and Jane? And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!'" (19). With the wallpaper serving as a symbol of patriarchal oppression, the heroine announces her freedom from, and even opposition to, her husband. While

her secrecy is certainly a burn to patriarchs, her openness is even more scalding. Through her loyalty to her intellectual identity and outspokenness (another "unfeminine" quality), she simultaneously maintains her anti-patriarchal identity and strips the patriarchy of their primary area of control: their power over her.

Defiant Traits: Appearances and Reputation

Regardless of men's attempts to keep their wives and daughters as "property," these heroines are *not* bound by these stereotypes. As a result, they are often outcast from society, or at least, set apart in some respect. Alexandra is outcast from her own family to a degree because of her stereotypically "masculine" qualities, both in appearance and in attitude. In spite of patriarchal norms, her masculine style of dress does not earn her any disrespect from men, nor do her leadership and handiwork skills. Many of the male figures in this novel respect Alexandra, recognizing her for her abilities and qualities as opposed to her gender presentation. Perhaps, as this is the most recent to be published of the four pieces (1913), it reflects changing standards, revealing, unlike many feminist stories, men who truly support empowered women. It is also important to note that *O, Pioneers!* was published six years before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. As feminists were finally gaining ground in America, *O, Pioneers!* was demonstrating what an equal world might look like were it to be more fully embraced. Certainly, not every male character in this story is free from patriarchal self-righteousness, such as Oscar and Lou, but overall, Alexandra's non-feminine qualities represent an important marker in changing times in the real world and patriarchal subversion in her own.

Lily Bart partakes in a number of "unfeminine" behaviors that bring about scorn from her peers, specifically from Percy Gryse from whom she has to conceal her fondness of smoking. The eventual knowledge of Lily's affinity for cigarettes "startled... Mr. Percy Gryce, whose own

lips were never defiled by tobacco" (25). While these practices were still considered masculine, in reality, many women during the time were engaging in these habits. Meredith Goldsmith writes about the literature of the time, saying,

> Most temperance fiction rested on strict gender binaries, in which female moral superiority could sway the male user from self-degradation. However, as the late-nineteenth century added morphine and other medications to the catalogue of addictions, the female morphine addict became the prototypical substance abuser, upsetting gender norms in the process (243-244).

While Lily is no morphine addict, it is interesting to note that smoking became popular among women despite its, as Gryce would describe it, "defiling" nature. Though Lily does attempt to keep Percy in the dark about her habits, she does not give them up. Lily may be forced to play a part in order to maneuver throughout society, but she is unwilling to change her private self. Wharton took Goldsmith's definition of "temperance fiction" and turned it on its head, creating a female protagonist who not only does *not* attempt to prevent men from smoking, but happily engages in it herself. This is a powerful deconstruction of Petrarchan Pedestal ideas about women. Similarly, Lily's engagement with gambling is of real importance to her. Wharton writes, "She had barely enough money to pay... her gambling debts; and none of the desultory interests which she dignified with the name of tastes was pronounced enough to enable her to live contentedly in obscurity" (39-40). She also notes "the idea of the gambling debt… frightened Percy" (76). For historical context, Goldsmith notes that "[at] the moment of *The House of Mirth*, American anti-gambling fervor had reached its peak" (247). Even despite the widespread disdain for gambling, Lily participates anyway. For a character who, in many senses, is attempting to make herself palatable to the public, it is bold of her to continue an activity so

widely scorned. This is not meant to be an approval of detrimental activities, but rather of the disruption of expectations set for women. Mary Carney argues, "Lily Bart's susceptibility to addictive behaviors [smoking and gambling] not only threatens her femininity and class position, it also destabilizes gender relations and conceptions of self" (130). It is difficult to deny the fact that masculine oppression did not play a role in bringing about Lily's love of smoking and gambling. However, this does not discount the fact that Lily still remains true to her own wishes by disregarding the "threat" to her "femininity." And while this does, perhaps, cause internal uncertainty about her identity, this could easily be considered a result of her increasing awareness about the unfairness of the patriarchal standards thrust upon her. Regardless of whether or not it is good for her physical health, Lily is insistent on maintaining her identity. If she were to give up gambling and smoking, it ought to be for herself, and not for men like Percy Gryce, and she recognizes this.

The Toll of the Patriarchy

It would be remiss to fail to acknowledge the fact that, ultimately, the patriarchy did destroy some of these characters, effectively killing Lily and Edna. Scholars wonder whether they intended to commit suicide, and, in Edna's case, whether or not she even died. Robert Treu writes on the matter, "Kate Chopin had every right, I think, to deny her readers the pleasure of an easy ending. Had she wanted to, she might have ended the novel with a funeral scene, complete with ideological clarification in the form of weeping friends" (34). It appears, then, that this ambiguity was an intentional choice on the part of the author. Similarly, Wharton writes of the night of Lily's death,

> She must shut them out for a few hours; she must take a brief bath of oblivion. She put out her hand, and measured the soothing drops into a glass; but as she did so, she knew

> they would be powerless against the supernatural lucidity of her brain. She had long since raised the dose to its highest limit, but tonight she felt she must increase it. She knew she took a slight risk in doing so—she remembered the chemist's warning. If sleep came at all, it might be a sleep without waking. But after all that was but one chance in a hundred: the action of the drug was incalculable, and the addition of a few drops to the regular dose would probably do no more than procure for her the rest she so desperately needed.... (313).

On one hand, it appears that Lily was "so [desperate]" for rest that she took a risk and ended up dying as a mistake. On the other hand, perhaps this desire to continually increase her dosage reflects the actions of a more intentional suicide. Wolff, who has written about both novels, notes that "[until] Wharton wrote *The House of Mirth*, no one had troubled to detail what it would be like to be the women thus exalted and objectified" as Lily had been (39). It would stand to reason that Wharton, who may have been experiencing the same feelings, was familiar with the uncertainty accompanying womanhood at the time. As a result, perhaps she preferred an ambiguous ending to reflect that uncertainty. As the patriarchy stifles Lily's and Edna's individuality, their tenacity to be themselves resists, but eventually, they are broken. Not all feminist stories can be success stories. Without these tragedies, the severity of the patriarchal forces at work could not be unmasked.

Conclusion

These four heroines, and their authors, serve as exemplary models of the ways in which different women approach feminism. While some declare their independence boldly, others are forced to make small, internal changes. Regardless, all of these women were able to defy the patriarchy by their own means, interrupting the way the world will run forever. Though not every

character goes about reclaiming their identities in the way that Edna does, it is easy to see that there is no one right way to be a feminist. In their own ways, these four characters take claims on some of the most essential aspects of identity, as they refuse to lose themselves to the patriarchy. Because of pave-making women like Cather, Chopin, Wharton, and Gilman, people around the world are embracing feminism unlike ever before. And while the United States still has a way to go to achieve true equality, it is the brave women like these who bring us leaps and bounds closer.

Works Cited

Briggs, Laura. "The Race of Hysteria: "Overcivilization" and the "Savage" Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology." American Quarterly, vol. 52 no. 2, 2000, pp. 246-273. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/aq.2000.0013.

In this article, Briggs argues that the 19th century idea of hysteria excluded “savage” women. “Savage,” in this instance, could be defined as any woman who was not upper-class and white. Briggs cites examples from 19th century doctors and writers who confirm this belief. She defines hysteria for readers in two ways: she explains what 19th

people believed it to be, but also what modern scholars have come to know about it. Briggs notes that these ideas about hysteria also affected women's bodies by giving them harmful "remedies."

This article is useful to me because these ideas are relevant to the era in which my central novels were written. The patriarchal construct, hysteria, is perhaps the main idea of "The Yellow Wallpaper", and could easily be applied to *The House of Mirth* and *The Awakening*. It would, however, exclude *O, Pioneers!* because Alexandra is both poor and an immigrant. This very fact, however, is usable in my thesis. Briggs' discussion of childbirth's effects on hysteria apply well to *The Awakening* and "The Yellow Wallpaper." Perhaps the only weakness in this article, for my purposes, is that Briggs does not apply these ideas to literature. I also find this source extremely reliable because of Briggs' credentials as an assistant professor in women's studies at the University of Arizona.

Brown, Alan. "'The Yellow Wallpaper'': Another Diagnosis".'" POMPA: Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association, vol. 31, Jan. 2014, pp. 61–69. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=117429401&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Brown analyses the psychology of the protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper." While she would have once been believed to suffer from hysteria, Brown notes that she more likely has postpartum depression and pareidolia, the tendency to see shapes and figures in vague

things. He argues that this pareidolia may have something to do with an underlying spiritual aspect to her character. He also notes the importance of a creative outlet to those suffering from depression and argues this may very well manifest itself through the protagonist's pareidolia.

This article will certainly help me to explain the importance of a creative outlet in the navigation of the patriarchy. I would also like to use the spiritual elements if I can find connections with the other texts in question - I find this aspect of Brown's article truly fascinating. The weakness of this article is its lack of sources and the idea that "the protagonist is the victim of a loving husband and a well-meaning physician who refuse to admit that men and women do not view the world the same way" (67). This idea, unsupported, would deny the intentionality of the patriarchy, which I do not believe to be Gilman's intention.

Carney, Mary. "Wharton and Cather." *American Literary Scholarship*, vol. 2017, no. 1, 2019, pp. 125.

Carney discusses both Wharton and Cather as authors and gives details about some of their most popular works. She provides information about the authors' lives and how that might translate into their works. Carney talks heavily about *The House of Mirth* and *My Antonia*. She covers a wide range of conversations related to these works among others. She, like Goldner, writes about the aspect of "vision-building" - the heavy societal impact of appearances in *The House of Mirth*. Interestingly, she talks about Lily's attempt to free herself from the patriarchy by reimagining her life. Lily's habits of smoking and gambling are unfeminine, which Carney argues makes her uncertain about her own

identity. She also notes that Cather's works often revolve around unconventional ideas about gender, reminding readers of Cather's own rejection of stereotypical femininity and explorations of lesbianism.

Carney's article touches on topics of identity and patriarchy that I had not even thought of, but which will certainly find a place in my thesis. What is particularly important, I think, is the discussion of gender, especially in relation to Lily's personal habits. This article's weakness, for my purposes, is its lack of discussion of *O Pioneers!*. However, its broader discussions about Cather and her work can be applied to this novel as well.

Cather, Willa. *O, Pioneers!* Houghton Mifflin, 1913.

Chopin, Kate, and Rachel Adams. "The Awakening." *The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction*.

Barnes & Noble Books, 2005, pp. 1-136.

Crewe, Jonathan. "Queering The Yellow Wallpaper? Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Politics of

Form." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, vol. 14, no. 2, Fall 1995, p. 273. EBSCOhost, doi:10.2307/463900.

Crewe analyses "The Yellow Wallpaper" with queer theory - a rather unexpected take on the story. He points out that the frequent use of the term "queer" alone makes this piece justifiably able to be studied through queer theory. He argues that the wallpaper itself becomes the object of "queer affect" and makes notes of how the narrator's interactions with other females could easily be perceived as innuendo. In all, Crewe's main point is

that Gilman's work depathologizes the idea of queerness by demonstrating the harm of assuming queerness to be a medical condition, citing the role of John as a doctor to his "patient" wife.

This article was an unexpected find, but I believe it will prove itself useful to me in demonstrating the patriarchy's destructive role on a woman's sexual freedom. Crewe's writing style is rather ornate, making reading difficult. It could be a much stronger piece with plainer language. Admittedly, some of his points seem to be a stretch. However, I deeply appreciate his unique perspective, and I intend to incorporate it into my thesis.

Cruea, Susan M., "Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement." *General Studies Writing Faculty Publications*. 1, 2005, pp. 187-204, https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/gsw_pub/1.

Cummins, June. "Understood Betsy, Understood Nation: Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Willa Cather Queer America." *Children's Literature*, vol. 32, 2004, pp. 15–40, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/55612.

Davis, William A. "Female Self-Sacrifice in Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Conflict and Context." Notes & Queries, vol. 58, no. 4, Dec. 2011, pp. 563–567. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1093/notesj/gjr150.

Davis's article focuses on the scene from *The Awakening* in which Edna and Adele argue over a woman's responsibilities and self-sacrifice. He argues that the significance of this

scene can be revealed through cultural context, which he provides. He notes the uprising of early feminism in writings that details the plight of a woman for herself. The role of fear of appearing selfish is a major factor in keeping women quiet. Davis also discusses how Kate Chopin herself was a woman outside the norm who desired more than the quiet home lifestyle, a very probable influence on the message of the novel. Lastly, he defines the difference between sacrifice *to* and sacrifice *for*, arguing that, in the end, Edna chose the good kind of self-sacrifice: sacrifice for the greater good.

Though brief, this article provides important context for my thesis. Like Lily Bart, Edna deals with the idea of taking her life into her own hands, a means of subverting the patriarchy. While I believe the article would have been stronger with more textual evidence from *The Awakening*, I appreciated Davis's ability to convey his points with brevity. The idea of self-sacrifice can also apply to *O Pioneers!*, and I can use this article to make that connection.

Gargano, James W. "The House of Mirth: Social Futility and Faith." Novels for Students, edited by David M. Galens, vol. 15, Gale, 2002. Literature Resource Center, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1420043504/LitRC?u=viva_lynch&sid=LitRC&xid=8a25d82b. Accessed 17 Nov. 2019. Originally published in American Literature, vol. 44, no. 1, Mar. 1972, pp. 137-143.

Lily Bart's plight, ultimately, was a discovery of faith, according to Gargano. He argues that the final word she and Selden were searching for was, indeed, "faith", which Gargano defines as "an almost mystical assurance that only moral action can save the

ever-threatened continuity of human existence" (141). This puts Lily's death in a new light. It is no longer a signal of despair or of succumbing to oppression - it is a discovery of ultimate truth that brings her fulfilment in her last moments.

I was thrilled to find this article, as I am always interested in how faith plays a role in novels. I do not know that I find this argument totally foolproof. It certainly does not take every aspect of the text into context. However, I do find it to be an interesting, and certainly arguable, take on the matter. There is absolutely an element of discovering morality and ultimate meaning in the novel, so this would certainly apply. In this sense, I would assert that Lily's coming to grips with her life's purpose through faith is a means of her patriarchal navigation.

Ghandeharion, Azra and Milad Mazari. "Women Entrapment and Flight in Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, no. 29, Universidad de Alicante, Dec. 2016, pp. 113–29, doi:10.14198/raei.2016.29.06.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins., and Ann J. Lane. *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader: "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Fiction*. Pantheon Books, 1980.

Goldsmith, Meredith. "Cigarettes, tea, cards, and chloral: addictive habits and consumer culture in The House of Mirth." American Literary Realism, vol. 43, no. 3, 2011, p. 242+. Gale Literature Resource Center. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A253845349/LitRC?u=viva_lynch&sid=LitRC&xid=6cc5562a. Accessed 4 Mar. 2020.

Harrison-Kahan, Lori. "'Queer Myself for Good and All': The House of Mirth and the Fictions of Lily's Whiteness." Legacy, vol. 21, no. 1, 2004, pp. 34–49., doi:10.1353/leg.2004.0010.

In this article, Harrison-Kahan discusses many themes related to the place of minorities within the novel. She draws connections between Lily and Rosedale, both forced into creating appearances for themselves in order to navigate a white, patriarchal world. She also argues for the presence of a homoerotic element between Lily and Gerty, citing the scene in the bedroom as evidence. This could reveal more of a desire for male privelege than for homosexual intercourse. Overall, Harrison-Kahan asserts that Lily's appearance (her whiteness and femininity) reveal to readers changing notions about race, gender, and sexuality.

Because of its commentary of patriarchal navigation through means of appearances and sexuality, this article will prove very useful to my purposes. Its strengths lie in a thorough knowledge of the text with plenty of support backing each claim. It could have been shorter to make the read feel more coherent. I will certainly use this work to talk about the importance of self-presentation in a patriarchal world and the freedom (or lack thereof) that it creates.

Hill, Susan. "Landscapes of Excess: Sexuality and Spirituality in Willa Cather's O Pioneers! and The Song of the Lark." Theology & Sexuality, vol. 1999, no. 10, 1999, pp. 103–117., doi:10.1177/135583589900501009.

In her article, Hill argues that the elements of sexuality and spirituality are inherently tied to the land in *O Pioneers!* and *The Song of the Lark*. She cites the bodily reactions of the protagonists (Alexandra and Thea) to the land. By connecting the land to the female body, Cather presents a subtle expression of lesbianism. Hill cites Alexandra's recurring dream as an example of her slow acceptance of her sexuality. Hill further argues that Alexandra could be compared to Adam in the Garden of Eden, as Cather references Genesis in Alexandra's thoughts about the land. In this way, Cather is creating new ideas about theology and eroticism that are productive and healthy for her protagonists.

This is, by far, one of the best articles I have read. Of all the characters I am discussing in my thesis, Alexandra is the one who appears to be least affected by the patriarchy. Perhaps this is because of the freedom she finds in her spirituality and sexuality, as Hill demonstrates. This article is strong because of its many references to textual, cultural, and authorial contexts. It is written in plain yet thoughtful language that anyone with a knowledge of these novels could understand. Its only weakness, for the purposes of my thesis, is its discussion of *The Song of the Lark*. Without it, however, there is still a wealth of useful information with strong relevance to my thesis.

LeBlanc, Elizabeth. "The Metaphorical Lesbian: Edna Pontellier in The Awakening." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, vol. 15, no. 2, 1996, pp. 289–307. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/464138. Accessed 10 Apr. 2020.

Lindemann, Marilee. Willa Cather Queering America. Columbia University Press, 1999.

Nelles, William. “Edna Pontellier's Revolt against Nature.” American Literary Realism, vol. 32, no. 1, 1999, pp. 43–50. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27746960. Accessed 10 Apr. 2020.

NÚÑEZ-Puente, Carolina. “A Queer Eye for Gilman’s Text: The Yellow Wallpaper, a Film by PBS.” Atlantis (0210-6124), vol. 41, no. 1, June 2019, pp. 11–29. EBSCOhost, doi:10.28914/Atlantis-2019-41.1.01.

NÚÑEZ-Puente argues, like Jonathan Crewe, for a queer interpretation of “The Yellow Wallpaper.” She defines queerness and queer theory to start, then disucsses queer moments in the story, citing many of the same points as Crewe with some additional ones. She primarily focuses on the PBS film adaptation which she argues demonstrates queer themes though the husband and wife’s unsatisfactory sex life and masturbation scenes. She also discusses elements of spirituality and sexuality in the short story as well as the element of duality in the film.

This is a very strong article with solid textual and cultural evidence to support its claims. It is stronger than Crewe’s in that the language is much simpler, and the reader does not have to guess what point NÚÑEZ-Puente is trying to make. She is a straightforward writer who touches on many of the elements I plan to discuss in my thesis. Despite the fact that this article is primarily about the movie, there is also plenty of information surrounding the short story.

Nur, Dedi. "An Analysis of The Feminist Characters in Kate Chopin’s “The Awakening”." JEES (Journal of English Educators Society) [Online], 2.1 (2017): 1-20. Web. 24 Apr. 2020

O'Brien, Sharon. “‘The Thing Not Named’: Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer.” Signs, vol. 9, no.

4, 1984, pp. 576–599. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3173612. Accessed 23 Apr. 2020.

Peck, Demaree. "'POSSESSION GRANTED BY A DIFFERENT LEASE': ALEXANDRA BERGSON'S IMAGINATIVE CONQUEST OF CATHER'S NEBRASKA." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1990, pp. 5–22. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26283349. Accessed 3 Apr. 2020.

Perrin-Chenour, Marie-Claude. "Kate Chopin Et Willa Cather : La Filiation Problématique Dans The Awakening Et O Pioneers." Revue Française D'Études Américaines, vol. 69, no. 1, 1996, pp. 58–66., doi:10.3406/rfea.1996.1649.

Perrin-Chenour argues that the father/daughter filiation has problematic effects on the protagonists in *O Pioneers!* and *The Awakening*. Because Edna believes that she owes something to her father, she cannot find freedom, whereas Alexandra, who has been designated as more capable than her brothers by her father, is more prompted towards success, making her successes easier than Edna's. However, Perrin-Chenour argues that this success comes at the price of Alexandra's sexuality, as she enters into a heterosexual engagement at the end of the novel. She further asserts that both Alexandra and Edna's "return to nature" at the end displays a dependency on the maternal roles that they are given.

This article was interesting because it took a different stance than some of the others I have read so far; it looked on certain aspects of the novels (specifically *O Pioneers!*) negatively, whereas I saw them as progressive. It opposed the ideas that Susan Hill presented in her article. Regardless, I am positive that having a different opinion from my own will be useful to include in my thesis, whether that will be to bring in a new

perspective or to create a counterargument that I can oppose. I argue that the article's greatest weakness is a lack of textual evidence for certain claims. It is also in French, so I hope to find an English version soon so that I have a more accurate translation.

Rooks, Amanda Kane. "Reconceiving the Terrible Mother: Female Sexuality and Maternal Archetypes in Kate Chopin's The Awakening." Women's Studies, vol. 45, no. 2, Routledge, Feb. 2016, pp. 122–41, doi:10.1080/00497878.2015.1122505.

Showalter, Elaine. "Laughing Medusa: Feminist Intellectuals at the Millennium." *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 2000, pp. 131–138., doi:10.1080/09574040050051488.

Treu, Robert. "Surviving Edna: A Reading of the Ending of 'The Awakening.'" *College Literature*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2000, pp. 21–36. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25112513. Accessed 8 Apr. 2020.

Wharton, Edith, and Martha Banta. *House of Mirth*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Wiesenthal, C. Susan."Female Sexuality in Willa Cather's O Pioneers! and the Era of Scientific Sexology:A Dialogue Between Frontiers." *Ariel* vol. 21, no. 1, 1990, pp. 41-63.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. "Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death." *American Literature*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1974, pp. 16–40. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2924121. Accessed 8 Apr. 2020.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. "Un-Utterable Longing: The Discourse of Feminine Sexuality in The Awakening." Studies in American Fiction, vol. 24, no. 1, 1996, pp. 3–22., doi:10.1353/saf.1996.0016.

Wolff analyses the connections between language, religion, patriarchy, and sexuality in this article. Because women were not believed to experience sexual feelings at the time the novel was written, there was no language for it. Wolff argues that the parrot's babbling at the start of the novel is a reflection of women's attempts to communicate their repression. Women are only allowed to express sexuality as a means of motherhood, but Edna needs to own her sexuality for herself, not for her children. This creates a dual nature in her, causing her to rely on fantasies. This is why her situation with Robert will not work - he wants to put her back into the marriage scenario, remaining in fantasies forever. Edna, however, chooses to retain her identity and autonomy.

Wolff's article is beautifully written. It encompasses a wide range of factors relating to female sexuality both textually and contextually. She provides a plethora of background information on the medical and scientific views surrounding the topic which shed much light onto Edna's situation. I feel that the text could have used more textual support in places. Nevertheless, Wolff covers an extremely important theme in the novel that is essential to my thesis.

Wussow, Helen. "Language, gender, and ethnicity in three fictions by Willa Cather." Women and

Language, vol. 18, no. 1, 1995, p. 52+. Literature Resource Center, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A17363901/LitRC?u=viva_lynch&sid=LitRC&xid=bbc8123e. Accessed 18 Nov. 2019.

Wussow discusses three of Cather's greatest works, *O Pioneers!*,' '*The Song of the Lark,*' and '*My Antonia*', and their respective protagonists. She remarks on how the differences in the characters' dialects affects the perceptions made about them. Contextually speaking, this is likely because Cather attempted to become accepted by learning Greek and Latin, in hopes of being able to represent her androgyny more freely and to stake a claim in her identity. It is likely that Alexandra, Thea, and Antonia are doing the same thing. Because this unconventional language makes these characters outsiders, they have to find outlets of identity. For Alexandra, this is in providing shelter to other outcasts. For these heroines, there androgyny and language set them apart, and they use these elements, along with their actions, to create their identities.

This article captures a lot of detail in a short amount of words. It draws upon both patriarchal sources as well as elements of female empowerment and identity creation. I had not considered Alexandra's role as a shelterer as a means of patriarchal navigation, but it fits well. I wish that the article, for my purposes, was focused more centrally on *O Pioneers!*. However, the use of the other two texts demonstrates a pattern between Cather's novels that solidifies Wussow's claims.

Zahidi, Saadia. "Accelerating Gender Parity in Globalization 4.0." *World Economic Forum*, 18 June 2019, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/accelerating-gender-gap-parity-equality-globalization-4/.